

Eckert.Dossiers No. 4

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Orientalism and Occidentalism
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Skottki, Kristin. 'The Other at Home? On the Entanglement of Medievalism, Orientalism and Occidentalism in Modern Crusade Historiography'. In *European Receptions of the Crusades in the Nineteenth Century. Franco-German Perspectives International Workshop – Research Group 'Myths of the Crusades'*. Eckert.Dossiers 4 (2011).
<http://www.edumeres.net/urn/urn:nbn:de:0220-2011-0022-0087>

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The Other at Home? On the Entanglement of Medievalism, Orientalism and Occidentalism in Modern Crusade Historiography

Abstract

This article examines the construction of alterity in modern crusade studies. Instead of looking at processes of ‘othering’ in the medieval sources, it tries to understand how modern historiography constructs “others” (be it Muslims or medieval crusaders) and uncovers these constructions as products of a long and conflictual tradition of scholarly discourse. The main argument is that, up to a certain extent, the self-image of (post-) modern, western society determines how much the objects of historical research appear to be similar to ‘us’ or as ‘others’. These constructions of either continuity/identity or alterity seem to be natural processes of history writing, but the underlying judgements on cultural and moral difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are called into question here.

The ‘other’. Who is this other and where is he located? Somewhere in the Orient? In crusade historiography ‘the other’ usually refers to Muslims, or the inhabitants of the Levant. But in this article I would like to focus on another ‘other’, on the medieval other. This article will therefore explore not the spatial but the temporal processes of othering that are important for modern crusade historiography and medieval studies in general.

It is my argument here that crusade narratives need to be viewed through two different pairs of metaphorical glasses. One pair, binoculars, allows us to study the artefacts of past times as sources for our historical knowledge, and the other pair works as magnifiers with which we look at the recent scholarly discourse that determines our own research and its outcomes. In my view these two approaches need to be combined, especially when dealing with the scientific representation and imagination of past times and events.

In view of the famous comparison of Bernard of Chartres that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants¹, my glasses metaphor becomes even more vivid. In 1998 Benjamin Kedar also used this phrase to criticise our frequent unawareness of past approaches to the problems we as historians have to deal with today. He wrote:

[O]ur customary inattention to historical works that are too recent to qualify as ‘sources’ but too out-of-date to pass muster as ‘secondary lite-

¹ “Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos gigantum umeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora uidere, non utique proprii uisus acumine, aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subuehimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantea.” John of Salisbury: *Metalogicon* III, 4. Edition: John of Salisbury, Ioannis Saresberiensis *Metalogicon* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio mediaevalis 98), J. B. Hall, ed. (Turnholt: Brepols, 1991), 116.

ature', denies us the possibility to comprehend the process by which the perception and explanation of the problems in which we are interested evolved in the past; nor are we capable of grasping realistically our true role in that process. Both dwarfs and giants, I submit, may benefit from glancing down the ladder of shoulders on the uppermost rung of which they themselves are perched. Such a downward glance may amuse them, a no mean thing in these days of ours when so much historical writing is stricken with the blight of unrelenting seriousness.²

I am therefore very grateful to the organisers of this workshop as they draw our attention to a nineteenth century that still is so important for our historical research today, as it is the giants of this era on whose shoulders we obviously still stand. For example, the blight of unrelenting seriousness that Kedar criticised so harshly is, in my view, a legacy of nineteenth-century historicism because the historicist approach is in a sense all too often a-historical: a-historical in so far as it is a hard and often neglected task to historicise our research as products of our own times, and in response to a long tradition of scholarly discourse.

Crusade historiography is a good example for this as our understanding of the crusades has changed again and again especially in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the periods on which I will be concentrating here. Thus instead of using the binoculars to look at processes of othering in the Middle Ages I will now use the magnifying glass to trace the invention of the medieval other in modern academic research.

The Invention of the Middle Ages

As we all know, the people of the Middle Ages did not perceive themselves as medieval. Rather, most European people in this period allegedly perceived themselves as living in a late if not the last era of Christian salvation history. The idea of Antiquity, Middle Ages and Modern Times as the guiding principles of dividing our history are a relatively new invention.³

Indeed, already back in the Middle Ages triadic concepts of salvation history existed, like that of Joachim of Fiore († 1202), who divided earthly time according to the Trinity into the Age of the Father (the time of the Old Testament, the time of the Law), the Age of the Son (the time of the New Testament, the time of the Incarnation) and the Age of the Holy Spirit (the age of freedom, the Last Days beginning in 1260, according to Joachim).⁴

But the origins of our concept of the Middle Ages can be traced back to the Italian humanists of the fourteenth century.⁵ The "medium aevum" that the

² Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Crusade Historians and the Massacres of 1096", *Jewish History* 12, no. 2 (1998), 11-31, here 11.

³ Ingrid Kasten, "Eine europäische Erfindung: Das Mittelalter", in *Germanistik in und für Europa. Faszination – Wissen*, Konrad Ehlich, ed. (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2006), 49-68.

⁴ Cf. Eugène Honée, "The Image of Salvation History in Joachim of Fiore", in *Tijdschrift voor theologie* 38 (1998): 392-408; Emmett Randolph Daniel, Joachim of Fiore, "Patterns of History in the Apocalypse," in *The apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Richard K. Emmerson, Bernard McGinn, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 72-88.

⁵ Cf. George Gordon, *S.P.E. Tract No. XIX. Medium Aevum and the Middle Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925); Nathan Edelman, "The early uses of medium aevum, moyen-âge, middle ages," in *Romanic Review* 29, no 1 (1938), 3-25.

Italian humanists referred to was still not completely congruent with our idea of the Middle Ages, as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Villani and Vasari all saw themselves trapped in this “middle time” that wedged in between the ‘glorious’ antiquity and a “renascita”, a rebirth of this antiquity dreamed of by the humanists.⁶ It is noteworthy that their negative view of the recent past and their own time was almost exclusively limited to the arts, as they saw the ‘good style’ of the ‘elders’ lost in the course of time, while they usually made no judgements of human history in general.

The idea of the Middle Ages became more prominent and was applied to other areas of human life during the sixteenth-century Renaissance. Although Renaissance and Reformation were two quite different phenomena, they both tried to disassociate themselves from the recent past by establishing a new chronology: an immaculate origin, a time of corruption (the Middle Ages) and finally – in their own time – the rediscovery of the original sources that allowed to restore the original form (“reformatio”) or a rebirth of the ancient ideal (“renaissance”).⁷ In Reformation thought the Middle Ages became the Dark Ages of the papal tyranny that kept the faithful from the true gospel. Thus it is no wonder that it was two German protestant scholars who first prominently used the division of history into the triad of Antiquity-Middle Ages-Modern Times in their very influential history textbooks at the end of the seventeenth century: Georg Horn(ius) and Christoph Cellarius.⁸ Horn for example defined the Middle Ages as the time between the emergence of the Antichrist and the Reformation (“Ab Antichristo usque ad Reformationem”), the Antichrist being the Roman pontiff, who according to classical Reformation interpretation was revealed as such when he elevated himself above the other prelates of the church and claimed mundane power over the occidental empires.⁹

Again it was a prominent Protestant historian who first used the term ‘middle age’ in English, namely John Foxe (†1587) in his “Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Days”, also known as “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs” and first published in 1563.¹⁰ In the second edition from 1570 Foxe used ‘middle

⁶ Cf. Alfred Dove, “Der Streit um das Mittelalter”, in *Historische Zeitschrift* 116, no 2 (1916), 209-230, especially 213-217.

⁷ Cf. Uwe Neddermeyer, *Das Mittelalter in der deutschen Historiographie vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert: Geschichtsgliederung und Epochenverständnis in der frühen Neuzeit* (Köln: Böhlau 1988).

⁸ Cf. Johan Hendrik Jacob van der Pot, *Sinndeutung und Periodisierung der Geschichte: Eine systematische Übersicht der Theorien und Auffassungen* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 316-317 with references; the work mentioned is: Christoph Cellarius, *Christophori Cellarii historia universalis. Breviter ac perspicue exposita, in antiquam, et medii aevi ac novam divisa, cum notis perpetuis* (Jena: Bielke, 1703).

⁹ Georg Horn, *Georgii Hornii Historia Ecclesiastica et Politica*, (Leiden: Hack, 1665), the second period (Middle Ages) is treated on pp. 129-168. Interestingly enough his account of this period begins with Muhammad and the loss of Christian territory and faith in the orient. For the influence of humanist critique on papal claims for worldly power in Luther’s concept of the papal Antichrist compare the recent study: David M. Whitford, “The Papal Antichrist. Martin Luther and the Underappreciated Influence of Lorenzo Valla”, in *Renaissance Quarterly* 61, no 1 (2008): 26-52.

¹⁰ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perilous days, touching matters of the Church, wherein are comprehended and described the great persecutions and horrible troubles that have been wrought and practised by the Romish prelates, specially in this realm of*

age' to denounce the time when the monks went astray by leaving the wilderness, becoming priests, intermingling with the nobility and interfering in worldly affairs.¹¹

Two observations need to be stressed: first, the terms 'Middle Ages' and 'medieval' have implied, since their very first usage, an image of darkness, deterioration and renunciation from the 'good style' of Antiquity or the true faith of the Old Church. Otherness therefore is something inherently characteristic for the idea of the Middle Ages. Since their invention the Middle Ages were never completely dark of course, as prominent figures were always found, be they mighty kings or true believers, but in the end these little shining lights only plunged the overwhelming part of this time into an even darker shadow.¹²

Second, the triadic division of history was, until the eighteenth century, still part of a salvation-historical concept; especially in protestant circles the present times were still conceived as the latter times and the end of this world imminent. According to this concept the objective of history was its end, because after judgement day this world and its history would no longer exist. A state of perfection and harmony could only be established in a transcendent 'new world', in which God's creation would be reconciled again with the Creator (cf. Rev 21:1-4). As for example Frank Rexroth has shown, this salvation history concept was only abandoned in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when for the first time history became a secular concept no longer attached to the Christian idea of history as guided by God's plan for his people.¹³ But the secular idea of history as an autonomous object for academic research was not, ironically, a concept free of a teleological bias.¹⁴ The concept of 'modernity', especially as opposed to the Middle Ages, implied ideas of development, progress and evolution and therefore itself having an objective ("telos"), but now an entire inner worldly state of perfection and harmony.¹⁵ Noteworthy here is that both the concepts of the Middle Ages and of modernity are fundamentally oriented and defined occidental as both terms were developed by Western

England and Scotland, from the year of our Lord 1000 unto the time now present: gathered and collected according to the true copies and writings certificatory, as well of the parties themselves that suffered, as also out of the bishops' registers, which were the doers thereof (London: s.ed.,1563).

¹¹ "Thus thou seest, gentle reader, sufficiently declared what the monks were in the primitive time of the church, and what were the monks of the middle age, and of these our later days of the church." John Fox, "The acts and monuments of the Church. Book 1", John Cumming, ed. (London: George Virtue, 1844), 212.

¹² Cf. Klaus Arnold, "Das 'finstere' Mittelalter. Zur Genese und Phänomenologie eines Fehlurteils", in *Saeculum* 32 (1981), 287-300.

¹³ Frank Rexroth, "Das Mittelalter und die Moderne in den Meistererzählungen der historischen Wissenschaften", in *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 38, no 151 (2008), 12-31; „Meistererzählungen und die Praxis der Geschichtsschreibung. Eine Skizze zur Einführung“, in *Meistererzählungen vom Mittelalter: Epochenimaginationen und Verlaufsmuster in der Praxis mediävistischer Disziplinen*, Frank Rexroth, ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 2007), 1-22.

¹⁴ Cf. Michael Allen Gillespie, *The theological origins of modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "'Modern', 'Moderne', 'Modernität,'" in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 4, Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck eds. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), 93-131.

thinkers to describe Western history.¹⁶ But I will come back to this later.

Our own times are often referred to as 'post-modern' or as 'second modernity' implying that the teleological idea of progress is no longer determining our idea of history.¹⁷ But as I will try to show, ideas of progress and development to the better are still often part of the unnamed presumptions that govern our historical interpretations, especially for those of us who work on the Middle Ages, as modernity constantly intrudes into our research like a distorting mirror. Accordingly, much has been written on the problems of the concept of the Middle Ages and in Germany in particular it was Otto Gerhard Oexle who published various articles on the images of the Middle Ages in modern times.¹⁸ There is no question that we always have to deal with this temporal tension as we always see the Middle Ages through the eye-glasses of our own time, be it modernity or post-modernity.

Medievalism

Medievalism is a term used to describe the receptions and images of the Middle Ages and is applied most prominently in literary studies.¹⁹ But Medievalism refers in most cases only to the popular image of the Middle Ages and it is hardly ever used to describe academic research on the Middle Ages.²⁰ I see this as part of the heritage of nineteenth century historicism with its demand for detached and scientific objectivity that dismisses the creative part of the historian in writing history. Creative imagination was for a long time only ascribed to fiction and not to scientific research. I would argue that this division is misleading, as both popular imagination and scientific research are shaped by constructions of the imagination, whether that be via scholars or authors.²¹ What distinguishes the authors from the scholars is the claim for truthful representation. Through the application of the historical-critical method and the use of original source material the historian's creative imagination is restricted and protected, so that the outcomes of his research cannot be challenged as

¹⁶ Cf. Couze Venn, *Occidentalism: Modernity and subjectivity* (London: Sage 2000).

¹⁷ Cf. F. David Peat, "From certainty to uncertainty. Thought, theory and action in a postmodern world," in *Futures* 39, no 8 (2007), 920-929.

¹⁸ To name just a few: Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Das Mittelalter' - Bilder gedeuteter Geschichte," in *Gebrauch und Missbrauch des Mittelalters 19. - 21. Jahrhundert. Uses and abuses of the Middle Ages 19th - 21st century. Usages et mésusages du Moyen Age du XIXe au XXIe siècle*, János M. Bak, Jörg Jarnut et al. eds. (München: Fink, 2009), 21-44; "Die Moderne und ihr Mittelalter. Eine folgenreiche Problemgeschichte", in *Mittelalter und Moderne: Entdeckung und Rekonstruktion der mittelalterlichen Welt*, Peter Segl, ed. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1997), 307-364, "Das Mittelalter und die Moderne. Überlegungen zur Mittelalterforschung," in *Paradigmen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft. Ringvorlesung an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, Jürgen Kocka, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, eds. (Berlin: Berliner Debatte und GSFP, 1994), 32-63.

¹⁹ Cf. Defining medievalism(s) (Studies in Medievalism 17), Karl Fugelso, ed. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009).

²⁰ Cf. Richard Utz, "Mittelalterrezeption/Medievalism - Editorial. What is Medievalism?", in *Perspicuitas: Internet-Periodicum für Mediävistische Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft der Universität Duisburg-Essen*, <http://www.uni-due.de/perspicuitas/editorial.shtml#what> (accessed 22 July 2011).

²¹ For the creativity of the historian see: Johannes Fried, "Wissenschaft und Phantasie. Das Beispielspiel der Geschichte", in *Jahrbuch des Historischen Kollegs* 2 (1996), 23-47.

mere figments of his mind but can be championed as attempts to reconstruct history.

The combined process of construction and reconstruction in writing history describes the nature of history itself very well. History can only exist if people attach importance to events in the past and are able to make sense of them. According to the classical notion of Isidor of Sevilla († 636), history ("historia") is the narrative of deeds done ("rei gestae") through which we can understand what has been done before (in the past).²² Thus history is always a textual representation of the past, shaped by those who note events worthy to be remembered, or in our case through historians who try to interpret the artefacts from the past as sources for history. Accordingly, I would define Medievalism as a necessary process of imagination and textual representation of the Middle Ages. But what has become obvious from my little excursion into the history of the term 'Middle Ages' is that it does not only describe a certain period of time but that it also contains judgements on the character and nature of that time and of the people living in it. The criteria to judge the Middle Ages or medieval people are of course established by those who write about it and are therefore shaped by actual discourses. And as time changes, so too does the image of the Middle Ages.

While the image of this period was from its beginning mostly negative we can find new and more positive attitudes towards the Middle Ages during the Romantic era at the end of the eighteenth century.²³ It was the German novelist known as Novalis († 1801) who first prominently painted a picture of the Middle Ages as a time of unity, harmony and faith in opposition to his own time that he perceived as being shaken by wars and faithlessness.²⁴ This view of the uniformity of the Middle Ages, being governed completely by the church, is still held by some medievalists, for example the famous Jacques Le Goff.²⁵ But the important difference between Novalis and Le Goff is that their images of the Middle Ages were of course shaped by different circumstances, the one reacting to popular and academic images of the Middle Ages at the end of the eighteenth century, the other to images from the first half of the twentieth century.

Le Goff's Middle Ages are shaped by the approach of the 'Annales' school. Starting in the 1960s the Annales School has attempted to understand the Middle Ages as a civilisation in own right that can best be studied using the methods of the history of mentalities and historical anthropology.²⁶ This new

²² Isidor of Sevilla: *Etymologiarum* I, 41: "Historia est narratio rei gestae, per quam ea, quae in praeterito facta sunt, dinoscuntur." Edition *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi. Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, W. M. Lindsay, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

²³ Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Das entzweite Mittelalter", in *Die Deutschen und ihr Mittelalter: Themen und Funktionen moderner Geschichtsbilder vom Mittelalter*, Gerd Althoff, ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 7-28, references 168-177. For 'positive' images of the Middle Ages since Johann Gottfried Herder († 1803) see also: Rudolf Stadelmann, "Grundformen der Mittelalterauffassung von Herder bis Ranke", in *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 9 (1931), 45-88.

²⁴ Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien. Die Christenheit oder Europa* (Universal-Bibliothek 8030), Carl Paschek, ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, [1799] 2006).

²⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval civilization 400 – 1500* (Oxford: Blackwell, [1964] 1995).

²⁶ Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Plädoyer für eine historische Anthropologie des Mittelalters", in *Früh-*

approach towards the otherness of the Middle Ages must be seen as a reaction to earlier attitudes, especially those of the nineteenth century.

Although nineteenth century historicism claimed scientific objectivity, different studies have recently shown that historians of that period also had an agenda. According to this agenda the Middle Ages were to be used to legitimize the emergence of national states.²⁷ Not only were medieval studies oriented nationalistically, but they also served to provide the nations with historical roots. This approach to the Middle Ages originates from the idea of historical development and progress, so that the medieval period was no longer perceived as the opposite but as the precursor of modernity.

While this may sound like no bad thing, the epistemological usurpation of the Middle Ages as point of origin made the images of this period susceptible for ideological and political abuse in the first half of the twentieth century. Norman F. Cantor for example, showed this in his highly controversial book "Inventing the Middle Ages".²⁸ Other recent studies also show very clearly how much medievalists took part in legitimizing the blood and soil ideology of the Nazis, for instance.²⁹ To stress the otherness of the Middle Ages as Le Goff, Jean-Claude Schmitt and other French medievalists did in the 1960s can therefore be understood as an attempt to free the Middle Ages from this kind of abuse and usurpations.

As our workshop aims to compare approaches from France and Germany it is worth noting here that it took a long time before the methodology of the French medievalists was also used in Germany³⁰, and even today the Middle Ages in German medieval studies is more often portrayed as the antecedent of modern times than as another culture separated through a hermeneutical difference.³¹ But of course seeing the Middle Ages as a civilization in it's own right

mittelalterliche Studien 38 (2004), 1-16.

²⁷ Cf. Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeichen des Historismus: Studien zu Problemgeschichten der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften: Geschichtskonzepte, historische Einschätzungen, Grundlagenprobleme*, Otto Gerhard Oexle, Jörn Rüsen, eds., (Köln: Böhlau, 1996).

²⁸ Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The lives, works, and ideas of the great medievalists of the twentieth century* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1991). See also the critical review of Glenn W. Olsen, "Inventing the Middle Ages," in *Quidditas* 14 (1993), 131-150.

²⁹ Cf. Eduard Mühle, Hermann Aubin, "Der 'Deutsche Osten' und der Nationalsozialismus. Deutungen seines akademischen Wirkens im Dritten Reich", in *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften 1. Fächer - Milieus - Karrieren*, Hartmut Lehmann, Otto Gerhard Oexle et al., ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 531-591; Peter Raedts, "The Once and Future Reich: German Medieval History Between Retrospection and Resentment", in *Gebrauch und Missbrauch des Mittelalters 19. - 21. Jahrhundert. Uses and abuses of the Middle Ages 19th - 21st century. Usages et mésusages du Moyen Age du XIXe au XXIe siècle*, János M. Bak, Jörg Jarnut et al., eds. (München: Fink, 2009), 193-204. More generally: *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft: 1918 - 1945*, Peter Schöttler, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997).

³⁰ Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Das Andere, die Unterschiede, das Ganze. Jacques Le Goffs Bild des europäischen Mittelalters", in *Francia* I-17, no 1 (1990), 141-158. "Was deutsche Mediävisten an der französischen Mittelalterforschung interessieren muß", in *Mittelalterforschung nach der Wende 1989*, Michael Borgolte, ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 1995), 89-127.

³¹ Bernd Schneidmüller (January 5, 2009), Rezension: Harald Müller. Mittelalter, in *H-Soz-u-Kult*, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2009-1-005> (accessed 22 July 2011):

cannot claim to be the answer to everything as it, too, entails some new problematic notions. I would like to address these under the question of Medievalism and Orientalism in the next chapter.

Medievalism and Orientalism I

As I mentioned earlier, Western historians have to cope with the fact that our methods and concepts are inherently Eurocentric. Ethnology and anthropology were the first that had to face the accusation that our understanding of other cultures and peoples are limited if not misguided, as our approaches and methods are not equipped to understand others on their own terms.³² This critique was most prominently represented by Edward Said, who accused Western scholars of misrepresenting the Orient and trying to silence the people in these countries.³³ He criticised the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism, accusing Western scholars of abusing their power of representation by inscribing certain, mostly negative, characteristics to 'the Orientals' that legitimized the political usurpation of the Orient through colonialism and imperialism.³⁴

I see a strong connection between the discourse of Orientalism and the discourse of Medievalism. Both construct the alterity or otherness of their research objects. But the image of an 'other' always needs to have a counterpart in the image of the self. The anthropologist James G. Carrier therefore defined Occidentalism as the self-image of the West on whose background the otherness of the Orient is created.³⁵ He pointed out that Orientalism is always dialectically or contextually defined through Occidentalism. Accordingly I would argue that Medievalism is always contextually defined through Modernism, i.e. the self-image of modernity. In this way we can understand in a more theoretical way the highly different images of the Middle Ages from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century as a more or less natural process of imagery and textual representation.

The almost unsolvable problem is that we can only understand other times and people on our terms. But what we can call into question are the master narratives with which the characteristics and the culture of the others are evaluated. What Said showed to be most problematic about the Orientalist discourse is the hegemonic power with which scholars not only describe but also create the Oriental other. I think the same is true for medievalists. I would like to gi-

"Auch wenn man heute dem Mittelalter mehr Alteritäten als Vorgeschichten und den Historikerinnen wie Historikern mehr Mut zum ethnographischen Blick auf die große Fremdheit wünschen möchte, weist dieses Studienbuch glücklich die ersten Wege in eine vergangene Welt."

³² Cf. *Anthropology as cultural critique: An experimental moment in the human sciences*, George E. Marcus, Michael M. J. Fischer, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Alan J. Barnard, *History and theory in anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³⁴ Cf. Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", in *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985), 89-107.

³⁵ James G. Carrier, "Introduction", in *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, James G. Carrier, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1-32.

ve you an example from a recent book on the crusades. Thomas Asbridge wrote in his study "The First Crusade" from 2004:

[O]n the question of Christian violence, the moral and spiritual code that governed medieval European society differed vastly from that which prevails today. Thus, before judging the nature of crusading violence, we must remember that in the Middle Ages, an era of endemic savagery, warfare was regulated by a particular, medieval sense of morality.³⁶

I must admit that I was a bit shocked when I read this for the first time as I did not believe that today, still, a medievalist would judge the Middle Ages as an 'era of endemic savagery', which makes medieval people appear as barbaric or at least less civilized others in comparison to ourselves. As I just suggested, this interpretation seems to be born out of a self-image of our modern Western society as progressing more and more towards a complete state of perfection and civilization, or at least of a society with a much more civilized moral and spiritual code than medieval society.

I quoted Asbridge as his interpretation is part of a very influential discourse that became predominant in the twentieth century. Accordingly I will now turn to some major trends in crusade historiography in the twentieth century.

Crusade historiography in the 20th and early 21st centuries

The rejection of the legitimacy of the crusades became the most powerful interpretative force for crusade studies after World War II. In an article from 2005 Nikolas Jaspert named four developments and events in the twentieth century that lead to a condemnation of the religious legitimization of crusader violence:

- the general secularisation and the critique of the churches
- the critical assessment of colonialism
- the 'Holocaust'
- the crusades as precursors of and triggers for the 'clash of civilizations' and international terrorism,³⁷

Although Jaspert rejected the critique born out of the conjunction of these events and developments as hardly helpful to understand the crusades, I find it important to stress again that I see it as the normal process of historical research to see past events in the light of the present. Although Jaspert was right in pointing out the strong moral rejection of the crusades in the twentieth century, we can now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, trace back other assessments of the crusades to this negative image of the crusades.³⁸

³⁶ Thomas S. Asbridge, *The first crusade: A new history: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 274.

³⁷ Nikolas Jaspert, "Von Karl dem Großen bis Kaiser Wilhelm. Die Erinnerung an vermeintliche und tatsächliche Kreuzzüge in Mittelalter und Moderne", in *Konfrontation der Kulturen? Saladin und die Kreuzfahrer*, Heinz Gaube, Bernd Schneidmüller, Stefan Weinfurter, eds. (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 2005), 136-159, here 138-139.

³⁸ For the rejection of crusader violence see the still most influential study by Steven Runciman, which contains this final judgement: "The triumphs of the Crusade were the triumphs of faith? But faith without wisdom is a dangerous thing. By the inexorable laws of history the

Concerning the first point – the general secularisation and the critique of the churches – I would like to draw your attention to the currently prevailing definition of the crusades by Jonathan Riley-Smith.³⁹ His definition of the crusades stresses the true religious motives of the crusaders and the character of the crusade as an act of penitence.⁴⁰ Riley-Smith himself declared that his interpretation of the crusades is a reaction to the overwhelming image of the crusades as motivated foremost by greed and the urge for territorial expansion. He saw this interpretation as a legacy of nineteenth century liberal and secular thought that rejected religious motivations in general as mere cover-up tactics for material aspirations.⁴¹ Some of us might remember that until the late twentieth century it was a common view that religion had lost its explanatory power and bonding force and would soon vanish completely.⁴² Accordingly, a materialistic approach, especially in social history, was predominant, but also in crusade studies. Riley-Smith's studies and those by others like the important article from Ernst-Dieter Hehl, who defined the crusades as armed pilgrimages, shed a new light on the crusades.⁴³ They made it possible to understand that medieval faith and piety obviously differ from our understanding of Christianity, although other examples will show that even today, there is no agreement over the true character of Christianity. For now we should keep in mind that since the 1980s or at least since the end of the Cold War religious motivations and explanations are powerful again and hardly anyone would deny today that the crusades were indeed a religiously legitimized and motivated enterprise.

Jaspert's second point – the critical assessment of colonialism – is still very important, as the crusades were for long time interpreted as the prototype of European colonialism in the Orient. This was seen positively in the colonial era itself, especially by French colonialists who saw their mandate in the Levant as

whole world pays for the crimes and follies of each of its citizens. In the long sequence of interaction and fusion between Orient and Occident out of which our civilization has grown, the Crusades were a tragic and destructive episode. The historian as he gazes back across the centuries at their gallant story must find his admiration overcast by sorrow at the witness that it bears the limitations of human nature. There was so much courage and so little honour, so much devotion and so little understanding. High ideas were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness; and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost." *A history of the crusades. Volume 3: The kingdom of Acre and the later crusades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 480.

³⁹ Cf. his highly influential standard works: Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What were the crusades?* (London: Macmillan, 1977 [latest edition 2009]); *The first crusade and the idea of crusading* (London: Athlone, 1986 [latest edition 2009]).

⁴⁰ Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Kreuzzüge. A. Definition. II. Der Kreuzzug," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 5: CD-ROM Ausgabe, J.B. Metzler 2000, 1508-1509; "Kreuzzüge", in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 20 (1990), 1-10.

⁴¹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, "History, the crusades and the Latin East, 1095-1204: A personal view", in *Crusaders and Muslims in twelfth-century Syria*, Maya Shatzmiller, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 1-17.

⁴² Cf. Alex Saxton, "The God Debates and the Materialist Interpretation of History", in *Science & society* 73, no 4 (2009), 474-498; Antonio Labriola, "The materialistic conception of history", in *Roots of the Italian school of economics and finance* 87, no 8 (1998), 799-804.

⁴³ Ernst-Dieter Hehl, "Was ist eigentlich ein Kreuzzug?", in *Historische Zeitschrift* 259, no 2 (1994), 297-336.

the return into French territories that existed since the period of the crusades.⁴⁴

The idea of crusader colonialism became a negative reference point in the process of decolonization and was also used to show that the crusaders were indeed driven by greed and not by piety.⁴⁵ But I was quite disturbed by what Jessalyn Bird wrote recently about the idea of crusader colonialism:

Historians from the Near East and non-European countries have often seen the Crusades as the first emergence of a cyclical European colonialism that would lead to Columbus, the British Empire, and the partitioning of the Globe following World War Two. Adherents of this “colonialist” theory characterize the Crusades in the Baltic as a nascent *Drang nach Osten*, the Reconquista in Spain, and the crusade against the Albigensians in the Midi as wars of expansion window-dressed with religion.⁴⁶

Bird obviously tries to denigrate this interpretation as a kind of oriental revenge for modern colonialism and imperialism. It is true that the alliance of the crusades with modern forms of Western imperialism is also part of the anti-Western rhetoric in fundamental Islamic and nationalist Arabic circles, but it certainly cannot be dismissed as their invention.⁴⁷ To avoid such unrestrained attributions it is important to glance down the ladder of shoulders, as Benjamin Kedar demanded (cf. my introductory remarks), and thereby becoming aware of earlier historical interpretations from our own scientific community. I also find it problematic to reject the notion of crusader colonialism completely, as for example some chronicles of the first crusade, like that by Robert the Monk, very clearly portray the crusades as a fulfilment of the biblical promise of the return to the God-given homeland in the Levant.⁴⁸ This is a

⁴⁴ The French general Henri Gouraud is said to have kicked Saladin’s tomb when the French invaded Syria in 1920 exclaiming “Saladin we’re back!” – an anecdote that is hard to verify but which is cited over and over again. Cf. Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The crusade: A history* (London: Continuum, 1987), 303; Tariq Ali, *The clash of fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), 42. For the epistemological usurpation of the Crusader Castles as French national heritage cf. Ronnie Ellenblum, *Crusader castles and modern histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially 32-40.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ingolf Ahlers, “Die Kreuzzüge. Feudale Kolonialexpansion als kriegerische Pilgerschaft”, in *Mediterraner Kolonialismus: Expansion und Kulturaustausch im Mittelalter*, Peter Feldbauer, Gottfried Liedl and John Morrissey, eds. (Essen: Magnus, 2005), 59-81.

⁴⁶ Jessalynn Bird, “The Crusades: Eschatological Lemmings, Younger Sons, Papal Hegemony, and Colonialism”, in *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*, Stephen J. Harris and Bryon Lee Grigsby, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 85-89, here 85. The mentioning of the “partitioning of the Globe following World War Two” is obviously a mistake as she seems to refer to the mandates of the League of Nations following World War One.

⁴⁷ Cf. Osama Bin Laden’s statements about the “Crusader wars”: *Messages to the world: The statements of Osama Bin Laden*, Bruce Lawrence and James Howarth, eds. (London: Verso, 2005), especially 133-138.

⁴⁸ Robert the Monk I, 1: “Non vos protrahat ulla possessio, ulla rei familiaris sollicitudo, quoniam terra haec quam inhabitatis clausura maris undique et jugis montium circumdata, numerositate vestra coangustatur; nec copia divitiorum exuberat; et vix sola alimenta suis cultoribus administrat. [...] Viam sancti sepulcri incipite, terram illam nefariae genti auferte, eamque vobis subjicite. Terra illa filiis Israel a Deo in potestatem data fuit, sicut Scriptura dicit quae lacte et melle fluit.” Edition: Robert the Monk I, 1, “Roberti Monachi. Historia Iherosolimitana,” in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens occidentaux, Tome troisième, Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, ed. (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1866), 717-881.

strong religious legitimization for the establishment of the crusader kingdoms that as far as I can see is rarely mentioned in recent definitions of the crusades. And I think it would also be helpful not to draw a line from the crusades to modern colonialism as a historical development, but to see it as a projection from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that functioned as one possible historical legitimization of modern colonialism. In this way, looking at the crusades as a form of colonialism may perhaps not help to better understand the crusades, but it might be useful for reflecting the problem of the invention of traditions and so may become a useful tool for the study of modern colonial history and empire studies.

But back to Jaspert's third point – the 'Holocaust'. There has been a powerful discourse since the beginning of the secularization claiming that Christianity is prone to violence against 'others' and the crusades are often aligned with the Inquisition, witch persecution and the confessional wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁹ Also the Holocaust is sometimes seen as an outcome of the age-old Anti-Semitism or Anti-Judaism in Christianity, as for example stated by Peter Wiener who characterized Martin Luther as Adolf Hitler's spiritual ancestor.⁵⁰ Other influential scholars like René Girard or, in Germany, Jan Assmann saw the reason for the inherently violent character of Christianity in the exclusive nature of monotheistic religions.⁵¹ The characterization of Christianity as an inherently intolerant religion was also fostered by some important studies in medieval history, as for example by Robert Moore who described medieval Western society as a 'persecuting society' and also by Dominique Iogna-Prat who tried to show that medieval Christianity was always trying to exclude if not annihilate other forms of religion and heterodox beliefs.⁵² This shows that the idea of an inherently peaceful Christianity is, even today, very contentious.

Paul Freedman explained the interpretations of Moore and Iogna-Prat in a very plausible way:

The emphasis on medieval aggression and persecution of marginated groups is similar to the desire to see the period as progressive in that both agree on regarding the Middle Ages as foundational, the point of origin for the modern and contemporary Western outlook. One opinion sees the Middle Ages as the origin of a "good" modern (reason, individuality, political and social institutions from the state to the university); the other the be-

⁴⁹ Cf. Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986). So far eight volumes appeared, the latest about the 15th and 16th in 2004.

⁵⁰ Peter F. Wiener, *Martin Luther: Hitler's spiritual ancestor* (London: Hutchinson, 1945). See also more recently: Michael R. Steele, *Christianity, the other, and the Holocaust* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003).

⁵¹ Jan Assmann, *The price of monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [2003] 2009); René Girard, *Violence and the sacred* (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, [1972] 1977).

⁵² Robert I. Moore, *The formation of a persecuting society: Power and deviance in Western Europe, 950 – 1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order & exclusion: Cluny and Christendom face heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000 - 1150)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1998] 2002).

ginning of a “bad” modern (racism, romantic misogyny, colonialism).⁵³

If either the Christian legitimization of violence against ‘others’ is seen as an overcome relict of the past, like Thomas Asbridge does, or if Christian violence is seen as a burdensome legacy modernity has to struggle with, there is no question that generally religiously justified violence is seen as something foreign to Western culture at least since World War II.

This leads us to Jaspert’s fourth point: the crusades as precursors and as triggers for the ‘clash of civilizations’ and international terrorism. One of the main arguments to denounce the crusades was that because of them the battle between Islam and Christianity began.⁵⁴ This argument is closely related to the critique of the Orientalist discourse, assuming an everlasting urge of Western society to dominate the Orient and the violent character of Christian Western society. There were even voices after the events of 9-11 who spoke of these attacks as being a response to the long historical tradition of Western atrocities against Muslim societies.⁵⁵ But these voices are all but silenced nowadays, because the concept of the ‘clash of civilizations’ as promoted by Samuel Huntington sees the reason for Islamic violence today deeply rooted in Islamic culture itself.⁵⁶

The idea of Islam as an inherently violent religion is so overwhelming that it also found its way into crusade studies and it turned the question of guilt upside down. More and more recent publications stress that it was the Muslims who started it all and that the crusades were only defensive wars against Muslim aggression.⁵⁷ Indeed we can find in our source material from the Middle Ages exactly these kinds of arguments with which already the crusaders legitimized their enterprise, either claiming to help their Christian brothers in the East, or to free their own heritage from the Muslim invaders.⁵⁸ But it is less these arguments from the sources than the situation today that for some seems to prove the crusaders right.

⁵³ Paul H. Freedman, “The medieval other. The Middle Ages as other”, in *Marvels, monsters, and miracles: Studies in the medieval and early modern imaginations*, Timothy S. Jones, David A. Sprunger, eds. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 1-24, here 17.

⁵⁴ Cf. Tariq Ali, *The clash of fundamentalisms* (cf. note 44). Gerhard Armanski, *Es begann in Clermont: Der erste Kreuzzug und die Genese der Gewalt in Europa* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995).

⁵⁵ Karen Armstrong wrote: “It is now over a millennium since Pope Urban II called the First Crusade in 1095, but the hatred and suspicion that this expedition unleashed still reverberates, never more so than on September 11, 2001, and during the terrible days that followed.” *Holy war. The Crusades and their impact on today's world*, 2, Anchor Books, ed. (New York: Anchor Books, [1988] 2001, ix (Preface to the second edition).

⁵⁶ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, in *Foreign Affairs* 71, no 3 (1993), 22-49; *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). See also: Bernard Lewis, *What went wrong? Western impact and Middle Eastern response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁷ Cf. Rodney Stark, *God's battalions: The case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

⁵⁸ For the different versions of Pope Urban’s speech in Clermont 1095 see: *The first crusade: The accounts of eye-witnesses and participants*, August C. Krey, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 24-43.

Medievalism and Orientalism II

One of the most important promulgators of the 'clash' theory is Bernard Lewis, who in different articles and books tried to explain that Islam is alone to blame for the problematic relationship between Orient and Occident as Muslims always tried to attack and subjugate the West.⁵⁹ This is of course the reversal of the Orientalism discourse Edward Said denounced.⁶⁰ It does not come as a surprise that the adherents of the 'clash' theory compare our situation today with the era of the crusades, justifying the crusades as a just and necessary act to save 'our Western culture' from Muslim occupation. In Germany it was especially my colleague from Rostock University Egon Flaig who defended the crusades in this way.⁶¹ In France it is particularly Jean Flori who over and over again tried to show that the Muslim jihad is much worse than the Christian crusades, as the crusades for him are more or less an abuse of Christian religion while Islam not only permits jihads, but they are, according to him, a core element of Islamic religion.⁶²

There is also another major trend in crusade studies now to expose crusade myths, like in the above quoted article by Jessalyn Bird. The most important crusade historian trying to uncover these myths is Thomas F. Madden.⁶³ Many of Madden's more popular articles appeared in Christian online magazines and they are all linked on the important website for crusade studies, the 'Crusades-Encyclopaedia'.⁶⁴ His studies are obviously an attempt to overcome those predominant interpretations from the second half of the twentieth century I just pointed out. In some ways his revision therefore seems reasonable and necessary; unfortunately he goes so far as to also defend the crusades as just acts against Muslim aggression. To quote only one example:

⁵⁹ Cf. Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage. Why so many Muslims deeply resent the West, and why their bitterness will not easily be mollified", in *The Atlantic* (September 1990), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/4643/> (accessed 22 July, 2011); *Europe and Islam* (Washington: AEI Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ For the debate between Lewis and Said see: Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism", in: *Islam and the West*, Bernard Lewis, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 99-118; Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Definitions", in *Reflections on exile and other essays*, Edward W. Said, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 569-592.

⁶¹ Egon Flaig, "Der Islam will die Welteroberung," in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 216, 15 September 2006, 35, "Heiliger Krieg': Auf der Suche nach einer Typologie", in *Historische Zeitschrift* 285, no 2 (2007), 265-302.

⁶² Jean Flori, *Guerre sainte, jihad, croisade: Violence et religion dans le christianisme et l'islam* (Paris : Édition du Seuil, 2002); "Croisade et Jihad", in *Le Concile de Clermont de 1095 et l'appel à la croisade* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1997), 268-285 ; "Croisade et djihâd: Le problème de la guerre dans le christianisme et l'islam", in *Les croisades: l'Orient et l'Occident d'Urbain II à Saint Louis. 1096 - 1270*, Monique Rey-Delqué, ed. (Milan: Electra 1997), 49-61.

⁶³ Cf. Thomas F. Madden, *The new concise history of the Crusades* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); "The Real History of the Crusades: A series of holy wars against Islam led by power-mad popes and fought by religious fanatics? Think again", in *Christianity Today*, (2 May 2005), <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/1400196/posts> (accessed 22 July 2011); "Crusade Propaganda: The abuse of Christianity's holy wars", in *National Review* (2 November 2001), <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/220747/crusade-propaganda/thomas-f-madden> (accessed 22 July 2011).

⁶⁴ „Crusades-Encyclopedia: Myths, Misunderstandings, and Controversies,” <http://www.crusades-encyclopedia.com/crusadesmyths.html> (accessed: 22 July 2011).

From the time of Mohammed, Muslims had sought to conquer the Christian world. They did a pretty good job of it, too. [...] As far as unprovoked aggression goes, it was all on the Muslim side. At some point what was left of the Christian world would have to defend itself or simply succumb to Islamic conquest. [...] In other words, the Crusades were from the beginning a defensive war. The entire history of the eastern Crusades is one of response to Muslim aggression.⁶⁵

In this way not only the 'clash' theory is historically enshrined, but the roles of villains and heroes are redistributed once more. While the villains in the predominant images of the crusades in the twentieth century were the medieval Western Christians, it is now the Muslims (again) who are described as religious fanatics in past and present.

To sum up, the images of the crusades and the medieval crusaders changed rapidly during the last three centuries. While medieval otherness in liberal thought since the Enlightenment was mainly attributed to the religious fanaticism of medieval Western society, these religious motivations were later exposed as window dressing according to the materialist approach to history. Then the rediscovery of the true religious motivations of the crusaders was a helpful way to understand the crusades, but the connection with the 'clash' theory leads anew to the construction of the Oriental other. For me this is a really deplorable development because I think our historical research does not need these master narratives of friends and foes, or of villains and heroes – instead of sympathetically taking up medieval arguments or ignorantly rejecting them, we should try to understand them empathically and stay away from condemnations and blaming one side or the other.

Using the magnifying glass reveals that the 'medieval other' is not only somewhere out there, but that he also exists in our minds. Through our attempts to understand history in changing contexts and with changing perspectives the medieval other assumes a new shape all the time. Sometimes he seems to be the very antithesis of ourselves and sometimes he seems to be facing the same problems as we do. If we acknowledge this link between the historian and the objects of his research it becomes clear why a glance over the shoulders of all those other giants and dwarfs of historical research makes sense. In this way we can understand our new findings and interpretations as outcomes of a communication process between us, the 'medieval other' and those who tried to understand him before us.

⁶⁵ Thomas F. Madden, "Crusade Myths", in *Catholic Dossier* 8, no 1 (2002), <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/history/world/wh0057.html> (accessed 22 July 2011).